



How Four Teens Fought to Change Period Law

Julia, Jocelyn, Piper and Maia decided their school should provide free menstrual products. The four friends' activism led to them helping to draft a bill to offer free supplies in schools across their state.

Narration: This is Feeling My Flo, a podcast where we see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I'm Kamilah Kashanie...my pronouns are she and her.

We've talked to period activists on a few episodes before. To recap: an activist is someone who works to change laws and rules in their school, community, city, state...even the whole country.

On this episode, we're talking to four teen activists in Colorado who got together to make an important change in their schools and then they fought to change the law in their state.

Our producer Mia Warren spoke to them in Denver, Colorado...

Jocelyn Gotfred: Jocelyn Gotfred: Um, my name is Jocelyn Gotfred. I'm 17 and my pronouns are she, her.

Julia Trujillo: I'm Julia Trujillo. I'm 18 and my pronouns are she and her as well.

Maia Weslar: I'm Maia Weslar. I'm 17 and my pronouns are she, her.

Piper Acuff: I'm Piper Acuff. I am 18 and my pronouns are she, her.

Narration: When Julia and Jocelyn were juniors in high school, they started a new club. Here's Julia.

Julia: I think the goal overall was just to create a space within our school where people could talk about the problems they were experiencing and, like, have a community of people who would support them.

Narration: They named it the Intersectional Feminist Club. A *feminist* is someone who believes in the equality of all people. An *intersectional feminist* is someone who thinks about a lot of different things — like race, class, or nationality — and how they affect the way folks move through the world.

Back when Julia and Jocelyn formed the club, they didn't know if students would even *show up*.

Julia: Our first meeting was kind of rough, honestly. [Laughs.]

Jocelyn: Julia legendarily dropped an entire thing of guacamole on the floor.

Maia: [Laughs.]

Piper: [Laughs.]

Julia: Yeah, that's how it started. But there...there was...it was cool 'cause there was like a pretty good turnout from the beginning and, like, it sort of showed that there was an interest in this and that people did care about it.

Narration: Maia joined the club about a month after it started.

Maia: I remember my first meeting, I walked in, and we were all, like, making bracelets for a fundraiser. And just from the start it was just like a super, like, chill environment where you could talk about whatever issues you wanted to.

Narration: Maia and Piper have been best friends since the fourth grade. Piper joined later on, when the Club decided to tackle a new and challenging project.

It all started when the members of the Club started reflecting on what a *pain* it was to get your period unexpectedly at school.

Jocelyn: You frantically run around asking all your friends if they have one. [Laughs.] What we didn't know...was that they did carry them in the nurse's office before. But it's honestly another thing that has a lot of stigma around it because at the nurse's office you have to put down your name, write how many you're taking.

Narration: Even though the nurse's office had period products, not many students knew that. So the club wondered: what would it look like if the school bathrooms stocked products all the time...for free?

Providing free menstrual products in schools has been debated for years. But it's only *recently* that cities and states have started passing *laws* to provide products for free. [New Hampshire, California, and Illinois](#) have laws that require schools to offer free menstrual products.

But in Colorado, many schools don't even provide them in bathroom vending machines.

So in the spring of 2019, the Club came up with the idea of installing machines in their school bathrooms...to give *free* products to any student who needed them. But the school administration wasn't *really* on board when they pitched it.

Julia: They basically...they said...they kinda just came up with a lot of different excuses. They said there was problems with plumbing, which really doesn't make sense because, like, having more access to period products doesn't change the amount that people are using or flushing down the toilets. They said that there would be problems with fundraising, and so that's when we ended up fundraising our own money...and then they thought that people would be, like, throwing them everywhere and I dunno, there was just a lot of...

Piper: Every excuse in the book.

Julia: Yeah, pretty much.

Jocelyn: So I...

Maia: And then we debunked every weird theory that they had. [Laughs.]

Narration: When the school pushed back against their idea, the Club stepped up its efforts. They decided to raise funds, then buy and install the machines themselves...without permission from their school.

Piper was the treasurer...in charge of fundraising. Over the summer of 2019, [the Club raised \\$1,300 for the machines and products.](#)

Maia was in charge of planning.

Maia: I had done research because the machines had to be approved through our district in order to be, like, in a school. Um, and then I had to go through, like, the price and, like, getting the money, like, officially into our school account. And then finding the products and then I can't order through the vendor. So then I had to, like, get somebody else to order it.

Jocelyn: Yeah. And...yeah.

Maia: So it was just, like, this whole complicated thing.

Narration: Maia figured out how many machines the Club could afford with the money they raised...and the prices of each machine...down to the *cent*.

Jocelyn was in charge of communications.

Jocelyn: Learning how to perfectly construct an email with everything you need has been, like, a big thing for me. Before this, I probably could barely write an email. Now? Pro. [Laughs.]

Julia, Piper, Maia: [Laugh.]

Narration: It took a huge amount of organizing and planning. And in December 2019, they celebrated in style.

Julia: We had a little ribbon cutting.

Piper: Aw, we did.

Julia: We came and learned how to stock the machines and we were so excited and we were just taking a bunch of photos and going around to the bathrooms. It was really cool.

Jocelyn: Party in the bathroom. [Laughs.]

Maia: This was over winter break. So this was before like all the kids had come back to school and they were pristine and beautiful.

Narration: In all, the activists of the Intersectional Feminist Club worked for *a year* to get those machines installed. Here's Jocelyn.

Jocelyn: It was just so cool to like...this thing we've been talking about for so long and then it's, like, finally in the school. The physical boxes are in the wall.

Like, they're going to be there for a long time no matter what happens when we leave. Like, I don't know, it's just cool that we did that in our school.

Narration: Club members now restock the machines with pads and tampons. And their period activism inspired them to think bigger. Here's Julia.

Julia: I headed the Legislative Action Committee, and we were basically just contacting politicians and representatives and asking them to support a piece of legislation for our club.

Narration: That's right. The Club wanted to bring free menstrual products to other schools in Colorado...basically, to do what they'd already done, but on a bigger scale. And that required writing a bill. A bill is a draft of a law — a rule that we all have to follow — and activists often participate in drafting them.

These savvy student activists got a little help from a pro.

Brianna Titone: Hello. My name is Brianna Titone. I'm state representative in house district 27. And my pronouns are she, her, hers.

Narration: Brianna Titone represents the same district that Arvada West High School calls home. She was elected in 2018, [the same year that a record number of women ran for office across the United States. That year, 36 new women candidates won seats in the House of Representatives](#) — and she was one of them.

When the Club reached out, Representative Titone went to their school to meet with them.

Brianna: We all sat in one of the...I think the teacher's lounge, and I said, 'You know, well, tell me...what you want to do, what, what's this, what's this bill idea you have?' And they had lots of, uh, information. They had done some research and had some facts and figures about it. And um, you know, trying to make a compelling argument that it was a good idea. And I said to them, 'I like the idea, but I'm not gonna run the bill unless you run the bill with me because this is your idea and I want you to own this idea and I want to help you develop it and get this idea out.'

Narration: So the Club got to work.

Piper: It was kind of like a...telephone system. Like, Brianna would ask us what we wanted and we gave her pretty much just, like, a summary...and she would take it to her bill drafter and he would do his best, uh, you know, to kind of see our vision, and then she would bring it back to us and we'd be like, 'Oh we want to change this, this and this.'

Narration: Ultimately, their work turned into [Colorado House Bill 1131](#), introduced on the State House floor in January.

Here's a quick rundown: the bill [proposes that groups and organizations donate money to schools in Colorado with the highest reduced-lunch populations](#). That info is often used to determine which schools have large numbers of low-income students. In other words, the bill is trying to encourage people in Colorado to help menstruators who can't afford period products. If the bill becomes law, [the Colorado state government will reward public schools that offer free menstrual hygiene products to students](#).

Representative Titone told our producer Mia that the bill wouldn't solve *all* the problems.

Brianna: This isn't a complete answer, it's just a start of solving the problem. It's a way to get the conversation started. And the conversation has been kind of ignored and overlooked and people find it difficult to talk about. I was trying to get some other legislators to run the bill with me and they said that they would have a hard time talking about tampons in front of the House. And that's part of the problem is that they don't want to even talk about it, but the problem isn't going to go away unless we talk about it.

Narration: [On February 6th, it passed in the Education Committee — the vote was eight to five.](#)

When we recorded this interview, there were still a few steps left before the bill could become law. But when the coronavirus hit Colorado, the governor slashed the state budget. All bills that were considered “non-essential” were killed.

Julia, Jocelyn, Maia, and Piper were really bummed out about this. But they were still happy to start a conversation about periods in their local government. And they convinced the two largest Colorado school districts to install products in all their schools.

The activists say they’ve learned a lot from Representative Titone.

Jocelyn: She's smart, but she doesn't ever make us feel like we don't know what we're talking about. I always just feel so heard by her. Everything we say, like, it's like a real conversation, not with someone who's in power over us, but with someone who, like, wants to give us power, you know?

Narration: Julia and Jocelyn say they learned a lot about themselves, too.

Julia: I've, like, learned to advocate for myself and my beliefs through this. I don't think I'm a very, like, outspoken person, like, I'll settle for things a lot, but I've learned not to do that as much and to, like, really stand my ground.

Jocelyn: I'd say for me...it's just so rewarding to see people, like, get to know each other and actually have, like, a community, like, from the beginning of our club to now, like, the people in our club come every week and they know each other and it's people who wouldn't usually talk to each other.

Narration: Maia is even considering going into politics one day.

Maia: This is something that I want to do one day. And it's not something that, like, I did on purpose. Like I kind of just found myself in this project. And I was like, 'Oh my gosh, like, I'm learning all these things that I can take into the next, like, years of my life.'

Narration: At Feeling My Flo, we love stories like this one. Young people getting involved in what matters to them and making a difference.

Feeling My Flo wants to help you start important conversations at critical moments...like when you're organizing for change in *your* community.

You can read more about Colorado House Bill number 1131 on our website. We've posted a link there.

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This episode was produced by Mia Warren. She's our executive producer. It was mixed by Kojin Tashiro. Our sound designer is Cedric Wilson. Our assistant producer is Emma Forbes. I'm Kamilah Kashanie.

CITATION

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